

NEWARK, N.J.
NEWS

STATINTL

E - 267,289
S - 423,331

APR 16 1971

The CIA's Place

Richard Helms emerged from his cloister this week to deliver his first public address since he became director of the Central Intelligence Agency five years ago. What emerged with him was a reasoned defense of the CIA's objectives, none of it particularly new but all of it responsible.

What did not emerge, of course, was any insight into how well the CIA is meeting its objectives, beyond Mr. Helms' assurance that "the quality of foreign intelligence available to the U.S. government in 1971 is better than it has ever been before." Necessarily operating in a clandestine world, the CIA's boss could hardly have gone further, thus leaving it to the public "to a degree (to) take it on faith that we too are honorable men devoted to (the nation's) service."

That's the way it has been since the CIA was established in 1947. It's been hard to go along at times, since the agency has on occasion embarrassed the nation with erroneous information, seemingly attempted to manipulate international events, and exploited other groups as fronts for its work.

Perhaps, though, past difficulties have made the CIA more sensitive to its public image. Fewer embarrassments have come to light, at any rate, under Mr. Helms, though we may never know whether this is the result of greater skill in covering up or of keener sensitivity to the CIA's place in a democracy. However it may be, the director's address is testimony to his awareness of that place: "We propose to adapt intelligence to American society, not vice versa." That specifically includes, he notes, keeping out of spying on American citizens, a restraint which ought to be obvious for an agency that holds no domestic security power.

The answer to fears about the CIA's possibly operating as a law unto itself lies in careful surveillance, not destruction. The surveillance is the responsibility of the National Security Council, some select members of Congress, and other units of government. While this means to Mr. Helms that the CIA is not its own master, it also calls for faith again—faith in the watchdogs.

Democracy undeniably needs to keep its eyes open around the world, for its existence can depend on alertness to threatening danger. Thus the CIA's work, to quote Mr. Helms, "is necessary to permit this country to grow on in a fearsome world and to find its way into a better and more peaceful one."